

News from the Wyoming Department of Health

Friday, October 16, 2009

Swine (Novel H1N1) Flu Vaccine Distribution Underway

As flu activity continues to be high across the state, the Wyoming Department of Health says swine (novel H1N1) vaccine distribution is underway in Wyoming at the same time delays in seasonal flu vaccine delivery are being reported here and around the country.

“Vaccines are the single most effective weapon around to help fight influenza,” said Dr. Brent Sherard, Wyoming Department of Health director and state health officer. Wyoming flu activity is currently very high and is almost 100 percent due to the novel H1N1 flu strain.

“For the best possible protection over the coming months, people will need to get the H1N1 flu vaccine and a seasonal flu vaccine,” Sherard said. “However we realize it will take a little effort and some patience for most people to get both of these immunizations. We ask residents to understand this flu season will not be business as usual.”

“We believe enough H1N1 vaccine will eventually be available for all our residents who wish to be immunized, but the first shipments have been small,” Sherard said. “Individuals at higher risk for complications from this flu strain should be first in line for the available H1N1 vaccine.”

Target groups include:

- Pregnant women
- Persons who live with or provide care for infants under the age of 6 months (This includes parents, siblings and day-care providers.)
- Healthcare and emergency medical services personnel
- Persons aged 6 months through 24 years
- Persons aged 25 through 64 years who have medical conditions that put them at higher risk for influenza-related complications

Sherard reported 3,400 doses of the nasal spray form of H1N1 vaccine were shipped to Wyoming the first week it was available; 8,400 doses with both the nasal spray form and injectable vaccine arrived this week and 12,200 doses have been ordered for delivery next week. Shipments should continue to increase in the coming weeks.

The Wyoming Department of Health is ordering the swine flu vaccine for shipment to approved providers with amounts based on population. To help ensure the available vaccine gets to those who need it most, county public health officials are coordinating much of the distribution. The federal government is paying for the H1N1 vaccine; some providers may charge a small administration fee.

Seasonal flu vaccine distribution is being handled as in previous years with private healthcare providers ordering much of the vaccine directly from manufacturers. “Unfortunately, we are

hearing reports of delays in seasonal flu vaccine shipments both here in Wyoming and around the United States. At this time it does not appear to be a long-term shortage and we ask people to be patient,” Sherard said.

Sherard also noted influenza vaccines have been available for many years and have a proven track record of safety. “Novel H1N1 vaccine is essentially no different. No corners were cut in its development,” he said.

Of the total 1614 reported flu cases in Wyoming since late May, 419 have been confirmed as swine flu cases. Most other cases were not subtyped. Over the same timeframe, the department has received reports of 28 Wyoming hospitalizations in connection with the virus. The department expects the number of actual flu infections around the state to be much higher because most ill persons do not seek medical care or are not tested. Specific swine (novel H1N1) flu counts provided by the department only reflect cases confirmed by specialized lab testing as the H1N1 strain as part of the department’s ongoing surveillance activities.

Actions recommended to slow the spread of illness include:

- When available, get immunized with both a swine flu and a seasonal flu vaccine.
- In general, people who develop influenza-like illness should stay home from work, school or travel until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever. Those who are severely ill (such as having trouble breathing) should seek medical care.
- Avoid contact with ill persons.
- Covering noses and mouths with a tissue or sleeve when coughing or sneezing, and throwing used tissues in a trash can.
- Frequent hand washing with soap and water or the use of an alcohol-based hand gel.

Influenza symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headaches and fatigue. Some patients also report diarrhea and vomiting.

More information about swine (novel H1N1) flu and vaccination in Wyoming is available online at www.health.wyo.gov .

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